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Proposed 2026 Census data products

Proposed changes to 2026 Census data products include replacing Community Profiles with enhanced QuickStats. This paper details the changes.

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Key outcomes

In preparation for the 2026 Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has proposed some key changes to the existing Census suite of products. This paper will detail these proposed changes, which include, but are not limited to:

- No longer producing Community Profiles
- QuickStats being enhanced with more data and additional features
- DataPacks and GeoPackages being made available in a new tool
- Time series data being made available in TableBuilder

Alongside this paper, the ABS is encouraging Census data users to provide their feedback through our 2026 Census data products survey. The survey will be open between 12 May and 26 May 2025 ([participate here \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census-dissemination/2026-census-proposed-data-products-feedback-survey/\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census-dissemination/2026-census-proposed-data-products-feedback-survey/)).

The proposed 2026 Census product offering consists of the following products:

- Census QuickStats
- New Geospatial tool
- TableBuilder
- Detailed microdata
- Data by topic and analytical articles
- Easy read/plain language/Auslan outputs
- A range of Census reference material (e.g. Census Dictionary and methodology paper)

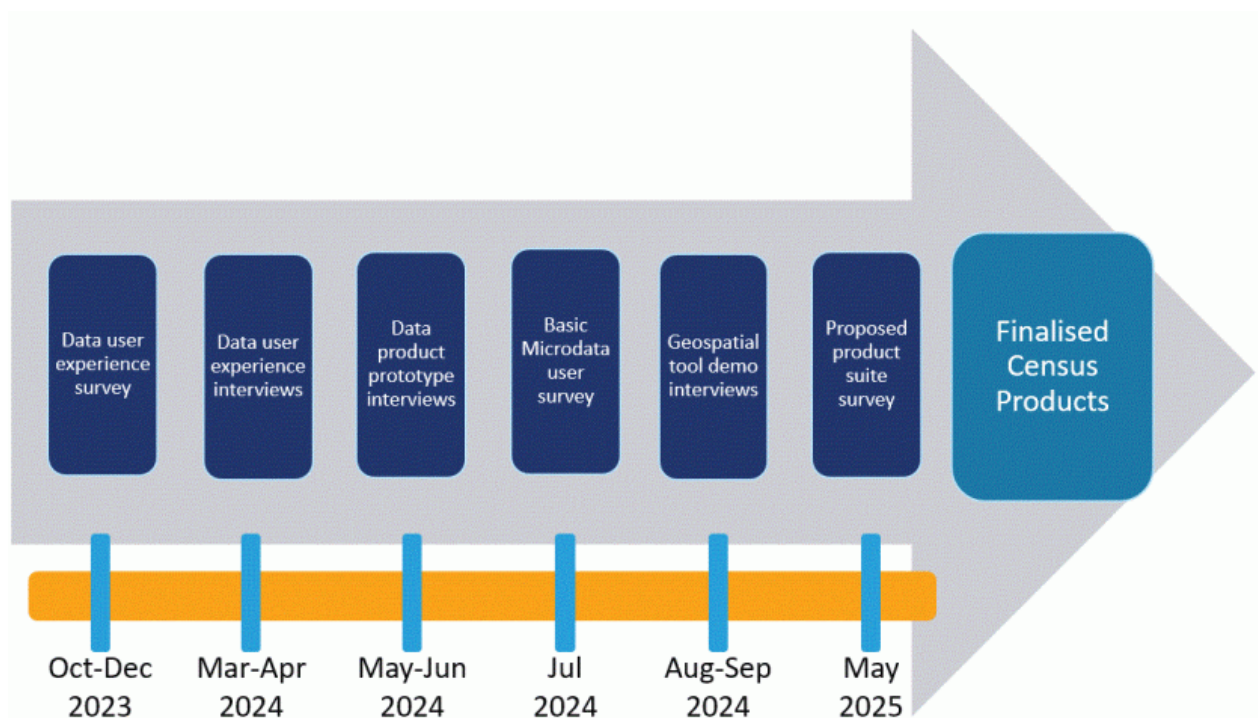
Census data will also continue to be made available in the following products:

- Data by Region
- Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset (ACLD)
- Digital Atlas of Australia
- Data Explorer/APIs
- Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA)
- Australian Census and Migrants Integrated Dataset (ACMID)
- Australian Census and Temporary Entrants Integrated Dataset (ACTEID)
- Other ABS publications (e.g. Estimating Homelessness)

Background

In 2023, the ABS began exploring how to best meet data user needs and expectations for future Census results. Investigations into user requirements, innovative dissemination approaches, and current product usage revealed opportunities to modernise and streamline Census data products.

Over the past 18 months, the ABS has engaged with Census data users through multiple rounds of consultation (see diagram below). This included feedback surveys, interviews, and prototype discussions, which highlighted the need to reduce pain points for data users and simplify data tables. Based on this valuable feedback, recommendations for a package of data products have taken shape.



Feedback showed that data users especially valued our QuickStats and TableBuilder products. QuickStats provides easy-to-interpret summary data on areas of interest, while TableBuilder offers the freedom to design customised tables tailored to specific needs.

Community Profiles were valuable to some data users as they summarised Census data for specific areas and communities in spreadsheets. They also presented a time series profile enabling easy comparisons over time. However, data users found that the very specific content in Community Profiles often fell short of their needs.

Feedback received on DataPacks, which are machine-readable, called for more simplicity in the data provided. Users of the current GeoPackages expressed a desire for interactive maps to visualise spatially enabled data without

needing specialised software. This feedback presented an opportunity to develop a new tool that combines DataPacks and GeoPackages. This tool offers a new way to extract Census data, and to browse and refine it in a user-friendly way.

Removal of Community Profiles

The ABS is proposing not to release Community Profiles for 2026 Census data.

Community Profiles were introduced as part of the 1996 Census release and represented a move away from printed publications containing aggregate tables, to downloadable spreadsheets. Community Profiles have continued to evolve over the last few Census cycles, with the most recent enhancement expanding the number of geographies made available. They have served the fundamental user need for geography-specific data in downloadable tables.

When looking to our international counterparts in other National Statistical Organisations (NSOs), the Community Profile style of downloadable aggregate tables does not reflect contemporary standards for dissemination. At their inception, Community Profiles offered a modern and useful presentation of data, but as time has progressed, the demand has shifted to simplified data needs and instances of these very tailored static tables have become fewer.

Consultation revealed a reduced relevance among Census data users, as many shared that they found the content 'too specific,' prompting them to create their own tables using TableBuilder. Others expressed that the format felt 'outdated,' and preferred the modern styling of the web-based QuickStats. For those who valued Community Profiles, its discrete and reliable package of data tailored to their geography of interest remained a key strength, along with its alignment with DataPacks.

Most Community Profile users also utilise other Census tools and most data in Community Profiles is available through these tools. The exception is the time series data. User consultation identified the Time Series Profile is highly valuable, and the ABS proposes offering it through the TableBuilder tool as a time series dataset. This will be detailed further in the 'Changes to existing products' section of this paper.

While TableBuilder was suggested as an alternative, feedback revealed that some users find it 'unknown' or 'intimidating'. There was strong support for enhancing materials to help users become more comfortable with TableBuilder. Expanding the predefined tables in TableBuilder to include core Community Profile content will also assist the transition.

Adding more detailed data to QuickStats and expanding its functionality will meet the need for data on selected areas for many users of Community Profiles. Reviewing the content of the Census Topic Data Cubes and making them more accessible will also support Community Profile users seeking data on specific topics.

Changes to existing products

QuickStats

QuickStats has grown to become a heavily utilised tool for many Census data users, with feedback indicating its user-friendly summary data for geographies of interest provides valuable snapshots for new and experienced users alike.

When Census data users require more detail than what is currently offered in QuickStats, they turn to Community Profiles for an expanded picture. To make it easier for users, in the 2026 Census we propose enhancing the QuickStats tool to allow users to get what they need in the one place. The key enhancements are:

- More data – additional tables and topics
- Table expander functionality
- Data visualisations

- Topic filters
- Data sharing features
- Download functionality

The ABS proposes enhancing the tables in QuickStats by adding additional content to enrich the user experience. This will include a table presenting data on the new 'sexual orientation and gender' topic and a review of the current tables to identify opportunities for improvement.

A new table expander feature will be introduced, allowing data users to reveal more results at the click of a button. For instance, the Ancestry top responses table currently displays the top five responses for an area. With the table expander, users will have the option to click 'More/Next' to uncover the top 15, 20, or even 30 responses, ensuring greater flexibility and access to deeper insights.

Feedback from data users indicated data visualisations are an emerging expectation for interpreting Census data. At present, QuickStats offers a series of basic tables, but there is a strong recommendation to enhance this offering with engaging charts and other dynamic visualisations. These additions aim to create a richer and more intuitive experience for data users.

Currently, data users need to scroll to locate their tables or topics of interest. Introducing a topic filter option in the QuickStats results will enable users to select the topics they find most relevant. The data linked to these chosen topics will then be prioritised on the page for easier access. Additionally, users will have the flexibility to toggle this navigation enhancement on or off based on their preferences.

Data sharing will be enabled with the introduction of features such as social media sharing, citation tools, embedding options, and download/print capabilities. These features align seamlessly with some of the existing functionalities available on the ABS website.

Data in the QuickStats tables will also be available to download either as individual tables or as a package on the user's specified geography.

New tool to replace DataPacks and GeoPackages

A new tool is being developed that allows users to download and filter data, as well as view it on a map without the need for any specialist software. This tool will replace the current DataPacks and GeoPackages tools with a modern user-friendly interface. It will support a range of users with a simple interface and intuitive filtering, allowing them to explore data on various topics of interest, filter the data by variables (e.g. population size or income range) and download it in a range of formats.

The data offering for 2026 will be based on the 2021 DataPacks and GeoPackages content, streamlined to remove unused variables and complex cross tabulations of multiple variables.

The ABS plans to do a 'soft launch' of this new tool with the current 2021 Census data a few months prior to the 2026 data release to allow users to become familiar with the new offering.

The key benefits of this tool are:

- It enables users to view the data on a map without the need for specialist software
- Data can be explored and filtered in the tool itself
- Data will be available for download in a range of file formats (including CSV, XLSX and various spatial formats)

User feedback on this new tool has indicated that the data is now much more easily accessible, and the interface is very user-friendly.

TableBuilder

Consultation highlighted that TableBuilder was a valued product among Census data users. They appreciated the ability to customise their tables and have access to a wide range of variables. TableBuilder will continue to be a key tool for releasing Census data. The ABS is investigating various ways to enhance the value of this tool for Census data, including adding continuous variables for easy calculation of medians and means, and the ability to create custom ranges.

Feedback also indicated the indispensable nature of the Time Series Community Profiles to its users. These profiles provide critical, hard-to-access data that is essential for informed planning, with particularly significant applications in the public sector. To ensure the continued availability of this resource and enhance usability, it is recommended that an additional Census time series dataset be introduced to TableBuilder. This will offer users greater customisation to maximise their engagement with the data. For users seeking simpler solutions, pre-defined TableBuilder tables will also be made available within this dataset, catering to users with less experience using TableBuilder.

Basic microdata

The Census has been released as basic microdata files which provide unit record information about persons, families, and dwellings. These files are designed for approved users to download and perform statistical analysis in their own environment. A 5% highly confidentialised file was released from the 2021 Census.

Basic microdata has become an outdated and limited solution for enabling data users to analyse unit record data. It is a heavily modified version of the original Census microdata. It contains limited information, which restricts analysis opportunities with sub-populations and geographies. The data has been highly confidentialised, with data items provided in ranges or broad groupings. This level of confidentialisation is necessary to ensure the safe release of data into a user's environment for use cases such as modelling.

The Basic microdata is one of our least-used products, serving a distinct group of users primarily interested in conducting analysis through regressions or microsimulations. Feedback from users indicates that the level of detail available within this product does not always meet their research needs. Additionally, more than half of users consulted expressed openness to using a synthetic dataset as an alternative to the current Basic microdata.

Given the limited utility of the basic microdata file, we are exploring ways to generate a safe microdata alternative. An example currently being investigated is using simulated or synthetic data, which will preserve key statistical properties while protecting against disclosure risk.

Improved supporting materials

Consultation revealed the shift in expectations around modern training materials, with a high demand for less text-based instructions, and more visual, interactive and/or video tutorial-like resources. Limited investment of time is essential, with data users opting for being 'shown' rather than being 'told' how to interact with Census products. With this in mind, new and improved training materials will be developed for the 2026 Census data release.

Changes still under consideration

More accessible content

To ensure our Census data is available to a wider audience, the ABS will provide some Census data in more accessible formats. This includes articles in Easy Read and Plain Language formats as well as videos with Auslan interpreters.

Improved website navigation

ABS is planning to refine the website navigation to make it easier for users to find and access their desired 2026

Census data products, to enhance their overall experience.

Potential changes no longer considered

Many ideas were considered for the 2026 Census data product suite, some progressing to prototype consultations. Some ideas were not carried due to stronger support for a more favourable alternative option, or they were deemed unfeasible for the 2026 Census cycle. These ideas included:

- A visualisations dashboard
- AI-driven search functionality
- The ability to compare data across geographies and time in QuickStats

Further consideration may be given to these items for future Censuses.

Existing products with no proposed changes

All the other Census data products do not have any proposed changes for the 2026 Census data release.

We'd like your feedback

We are keen to hear any final thoughts you may have on these proposed changes to our 2026 Census data products. Please provide your feedback by completing this [survey \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census-dissemination/2026-census-proposed-data-products-feedback-survey/\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census-dissemination/2026-census-proposed-data-products-feedback-survey/) which will be available from 12 – 26 May 2025.

Next steps

Census data users can expect the ABS to produce advice on final changes to the 2026 Census data products suite later this year, with the aim to spread awareness and ensure users have sufficient time to prepare for any impacts.